

The Nature of Survey Research

What are surveys used for? What can they measure? What kinds of questions can they be used to answer? We address these preliminary topics in this chapter in order to describe the modern polling industry.

It is impossible to determine when the first survey was conducted. There are several biblical accounts, beginning with a census taken after Moses ascended Mount Sinai. Later, the Romans took censuses to prepare for taxation. There were other early censuses, including the Domesday Book, a listing of all landowners in England in 1086. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, some polls were conducted by independent individuals and government agencies in England and the United States to study social conditions and the nature of poverty. Shortly thereafter, newspapers and political parties began conducting surveys in America.

By the 1920s, researchers were beginning to employ surveys as we know them today. The magazine *Literary Digest* conducted surveys to predict the outcomes of many early twentieth century presidential elections. These polls predicted the outcomes of the 1928 and 1932 elections correctly, though their prediction in 1936 was a failure. George Gallup began his political polling in the mid-1930s, as did several university researchers. Many of them worked for the federal government during World War II, measuring public attitudes on food rationing, price controls, and foreign policy as well as studying the attitudes of soldiers. After the war these researchers returned to universities to establish some of the major academic social science research organizations.

Today, survey research is a booming business. Surveys are sponsored by a wide variety of individuals and organizations. Some are sponsored by government agencies such as the Census Bureau. Others are sponsored by the media: newspapers, magazines, and television stations. Still others are sponsored by political candidates running for public office. Companies that manufacture and distribute consumer products or services—including airlines, dog food manufacturers, and phonograph record companies—are also sponsors of surveys. And finally, many surveys are sponsored by researchers at colleges and universities across the country. In total, these sponsors spend millions of dollars each year on surveys.

Surveys are conducted by hundreds of organizations throughout the world. Some are conducted by private research firms that are in business solely to conduct surveys for their clients. You have probably heard of some of these companies, including the Gallup Organization, which conducts surveys for *Newsweek* magazine; Yankelovich Clancy Shulman, which conducts surveys for *Time* magazine; and Louis Harris and Associates, which conducts surveys for the National Public Radio network. Others are conducted by research organizations that are parts of firms (including the major television networks, Procter & Gamble, and Quaker Oats), advertising agencies (such as Ted Bates and Associates and the Leo Burnett Company), and private consulting companies (such as Response Analysis and Westat). In total, these companies employ many thousands of people across the country in one phase or another of survey research.

As a result of the work that these individuals do, surveys are prominent aspects of contemporary life. Most people see the results of surveys in newspapers or magazines or hear about them on radio or television. Most often, these surveys gauge public attitudes on social and political issues. Surveys done by advertising agencies usually measure purchasing behavior, purchasing intentions for the near future, attitudes toward consumer products, and people's reasons for liking or disliking particular products. People who work in marketing departments of large manufacturing and distribution companies make extensive use of surveys when deciding which products to make and sell and which ideas for products not to pursue. Consulting companies that are hired by large corporations measure employees' attitudes about their jobs and workplaces, their communication patterns, and their usual ways of doing their work in order to advise these firms on how to improve employee satisfaction and productivity.

On page 7, you will see an example of a typical newspaper report of a poll. The poll was conducted by Media General along with the Asso-

ciated Press, and the article summarizes the results from questions relating to fear of crime. This article illustrates how the news media conduct polls to report, an increasingly common practice.

USES OF SURVEYS

Why have surveys become so important? Increasingly, our modern society requires data, and data that are useful for answering many important questions can be gathered by interviewing people. Surveys have been put to use in a number of important contexts.

Political Polls

We are all familiar with polls conducted to predict who will win an upcoming election. A generation ago newspaper articles about who was ahead in a political race relied on speculation by political experts. A political reporter, a political scientist, or a politician would have been asked to say which candidate was leading in the race. The experts were rarely identified in the articles, so readers were not able to evaluate the credibility of the predictions. As polling techniques were refined, it became clear that the best way to gauge public sentiment about an election was to ask people directly, and so polls have largely replaced political experts as the means for predicting election outcomes.

Surveys now have tremendous impact on political candidates' planning of campaign strategy. In the present age of television politics, many presidential candidates hire polling companies to track public opinion about them and about their opponents. These data are used to determine whether to make certain public appearances, whom to associate with publicly, what to say, what not to say, and so on.

Pollsters are also now accepted members of a president's team of advisers. Just as ancient kings kept court magicians around in case they needed special assistance, modern presidents retain pollsters. Thus, Jimmy Carter's key advisers included pollster Pat Caddell, and Ronald Reagan's presidential advisers included pollster Richard Wirthlin. These pollsters are consulted on a variety of matters, from the content of presidential speeches to policy decisions. In general, they advise the president on how to sell his ideas to the public.

GUNS DON'T HELP PEOPLE FEEL SAFER

NEW YORK (AP)—People who keep guns for protection are no more likely to feel safe at home than those who don't have guns, according to a Media General-Associated Press poll.

In fact, gun owners are slightly less likely to feel secure from crime.

But whether they keep guns or not, 70 percent of Americans think people should have the right to shoot intruders, even if they're unsure the person is armed, according to the poll.

Three in 10 Americans keep guns in their homes for security reasons, according to the nationwide telephone poll of 1,251 adult Americans.

Asked whether they generally feel their home is secure from crime, 70 percent of the gun owners and 75 percent of those who don't have guns said yes.

OVERALL, 73 percent of respondents said they felt their homes were safe.

Black and white respondents had significantly different feelings of security. Among blacks, 57 percent felt their homes were secure against crime, and 64 percent felt safe on their streets at night. Among whites, three-quarters felt their homes were secure against crime, and 80 percent felt safe on their streets at night.

Blacks also had less confidence than whites in the protection they received from local police. A total of 39 percent of black respondents thought the police in their communities did a good job against crime, compared with 61 percent of white respondents who said police did a good job.

GUN OWNERS also were less likely to have confidence in the ability of local police to protect them, the poll said. While 54 percent of gun owners thought local police were doing a good job, 61 percent of those who don't have guns felt that way.

Overall, 59 percent said police were doing a good job, 31 percent said they were doing a fair job, 8 percent said police were doing a poor job, and 2 percent didn't know or didn't answer.

The vast majority of gun owners believed they have the right to shoot intruders, even if they're unsure an intruder is armed. Although fewer people who don't keep guns felt that way, a majority also thought people should have the right to shoot intruders.

PEOPLE WHO live in rural areas are far more likely to keep guns for security than those who live in suburbs or cities. Forty-one percent of those from rural areas had guns, compared with about one-quarter of suburban and urban dwellers.

Rural residents were no more likely to feel secure against crime at home than urban or suburban respondents. However, rural and suburban respondents were more likely to feel their communities were safe than urban respondents.

Suburban respondents also had more confidence in local police than either rural or urban respondents.

SOURCE: Columbus Dispatch, Feb. 2, 1987. Reprinted with permission of The Associated Press.

Surveys in Court

In addition to their political uses, surveys have often been used as evidence in courts of law. Take, for example, trademark infringement lawsuits. If one company has a trademark on its product and another company makes a similar product, the first company may sue the second for infringing on its trademark. One question courts wish to answer in such cases is whether the public is confusing the second product with the first. This is a question that can best be answered through surveys.

For example, in 1964, the Zippo® lighter company accused the Rogers lighter company of infringing on Zippo®'s patent rights. Rogers had been manufacturing a lighter that looked almost identical to the Zippo® lighter, and Zippo® claimed that consumers were confused about which lighter was which. They commissioned surveys in which national samples of American adults were asked to name the company that manufactured various lighters that they were shown during the interview. A large number of respondents incorrectly identified the Rogers lighter as a Zippo®, even though the Rogers brand name was stamped on the bottom. This evidence convinced the judge that consumers were confused about which product was which.

Another example involved the Dallas Cap and Emblem Company, which put National Football League emblems on products they sold. The NFL sued claiming trademark violation. They used a survey to show that 80 percent of the public associated the emblems with the NFL and that 64 percent thought they were official NFL products.

The courts were slow to admit survey evidence. In the 1930s, the courts viewed such evidence as hearsay and hence inadmissible, particularly since those interviewed could not be cross-examined in court. By the 1950s, some courts held that surveys were not hearsay since they were not being used to prove the truth of what the respondents said. Meanwhile, other courts were accepting surveys as evidence of "present state of mind, attitude, or belief," which is a recognized exception to the hearsay rule. Survey evidence in trademark cases is still often challenged on the basis of the quality of the survey, but surveys are now recognized as appropriate means of testing trademark violation.

Surveys have been admitted in court in many areas beyond trademark cases. When federal regulatory commissions have charged that advertising creates a false impression in consumers' minds, surveys have been used to show the actual effects of the ads. For example, when the Federal Trade Commission charged that Hi-C® fruit drink ads led

consumers to believe that Hi-C® contained more vitamin C than orange juice does, the manufacturer of Hi-C® won its case by submitting a survey showing that consumers did not draw that conclusion. As another example, some defendants in criminal cases seek to move their trial from one community to another because extensive pretrial publicity makes it impossible to empanel a jury that has not heard about the case. Defense lawyers in these cases frequently submit survey evidence documenting the extent of public knowledge about the case in the community.

Government Surveys

Surveys are also often used by the government to compile statistics. The most famous government survey in the United States is the one taken every ten years by the Bureau of the Census to determine the population of the country. Interviewers fan out across the country and knock on doors in order to find out how many people live in each house and apartment. That information is used to determine the population of each city, county, and state; several important political decisions are made on that basis. For example, some states gain representation and other states lose representation in the House of Representatives every decade on the basis of the census's determination of their population. Similarly, census results are used to divide each state into districts of equal population for election of representatives to Congress. Allocation of federal funds to cities is based on their population, so the population census affects the revenue of cities as well.

The use of surveys by the United States government goes far beyond the census. Many government agencies are charged with gathering statistics, and surveys are used as part of their effort. For example, the 1965 Voting Rights Act was designed to remove barriers to voting by blacks and other minorities. As part of the administration of that act, the Bureau of the Census conducts a survey after each presidential election, asking people whether or not they were registered and whether or not they voted. Statistics are compiled by state, race, ethnicity, sex, and other demographics in order to monitor compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

Every month the Labor Department publishes statistics about the level of unemployment in the United States. They might report that the unemployment rate is 7.2 percent, up 0.3 percent since the previous month. Have you ever wondered about the basis of those statistics?

It turns out that the Labor Department conducts monthly surveys, asking people whether or not they were employed during the past month. If they were employed, they are asked further questions about how many hours they worked per week. If they were not employed, they are asked whether or not they sought employment—since the people who do not want a job are not counted as unemployed. It would be difficult to gauge unemployment accurately without such surveys.

As a final example of government use of surveys, consider reports of the crime rate. There are many ways to find out about the level of crime in the United States. One can collect information from police departments about the number of crimes, and the National Institute of Justice does just that. However, not all crime is reported to the authorities. As a result, the National Institute of Justice conducts regular surveys of crime victimization, asking a sample of the public whether or not they were victimized by crime in the last month. These surveys find much higher rates of certain crimes, such as robbery, than police data show. Victimless crimes, such as prostitution and drug use, are understated in the surveys, as is murder, since the victim is not available to be interviewed.

Consumer Research

Many commercial firms conduct polls, often as part of regular market opinion research. Companies use surveys to determine what new products to manufacture so that they can gain market share and to see what features are most desired for those products. Companies planning advertising campaigns often conduct surveys to determine what type of spin to put on advertising pitches in order to maximize effectiveness. Also, corporations use surveys to determine why a product is not selling well and use what they learn to redesign their product or marketing strategy.

The Nielsen and the Arbitron ratings of television viewing are especially well-known consumer surveys. Advertisers buy time on television on the basis of the number of viewers of each program as measured by these surveys. The most popular ways to determine this are by phoning people to find out what program they are currently watching, having households keep weekly diaries of their television viewing, and attaching a device to televisions in a sample of homes to keep track of when they are on. Networks use this information to determine how much to charge advertisers for each of their time blocks. Of course, when a program has too low a viewership, the network cannot charge

enough for the advertising time and usually chooses to cancel the show. Thus, these surveys affect the content of television programming.

Academic Research

Surveys are also conducted regularly by researchers at universities. For example, the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center surveys about 600 American adults every month to learn about their current family financial situation; their intentions to purchase houses, cars, and major household appliances; and their savings and investment behavior. The Survey Research Center also measures people's beliefs about the future of the nation's economy. The results of these surveys are used extensively by economists and business people to forecast purchasing, saving, and other financial behavior as well as to plan manufacturing and distribution strategies.

Scholars at the University of Chicago and at the University of Michigan conduct large-scale surveys every year to measure public attitudes on controversial social and political issues. The General Social Survey, conducted by the National Opinion Research Corporation (NORC) at the University of Chicago, has monitored changing social trends since the early 1970s. The National Election Studies, surveys that are conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, have tracked national political attitudes since the early 1950s. In addition to these national surveys, countless state and local polls are conducted each year by university researchers.

Media Polls

The major news media in the United States frequently conduct polls. Because of the expense involved in polling, many of these polls are joint operations of several media. Collaborators pool their questions and use the results differently according to their differing needs. Television networks generally focus more on a quick summary of public opinion that they can add to a major study, while newspapers may write two or three stories about the same poll. For example, *The New York Times* and CBS News have polled together for several years, with *The New York Times* running the interviewing operation and CBS News performing the computer analysis. The Media General-Associated Press poll in the article reprinted earlier in this chapter is an-

other example of a media poll. In recent years, *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines have also regularly contracted for polls.

The media use polls in order to obtain novel news stories. One example is *The New York Times*/CBS News poll before Christmas 1985, in which children were asked whether or not they believed in Santa Claus. Not exactly hard news, but wonderful material for a feature story. The Media General—Associated Press poll on fear of crime similarly provided newspapers with an article on a topic that interests many readers. Before elections, media polls are used to predict results. Also, monthly media surveys can be used to trace changing support for political parties and the president over several years. Finally, exit polls conducted during elections measure the demographics, motivations, and behavior of voters.

WHAT SURVEYS CAN MEASURE

This review illustrates how polls are a prominent part of everyday life and that they have tremendous effects; it also shows that surveys are used to measure many things. Although it is difficult to fit everything a survey can measure into a few categories, most things that surveys are used to measure can be regarded as attitudes (or preferences), beliefs (including predictions and assessments of importance), or facts (including past behavioral experiences).

Attitudes and Preferences

Attitudes are likes and dislikes. In more technical terms, an attitude is a positive or negative orientation toward an object, and it can be strong or weak. Many children have strong negative attitudes toward spinach, and most Americans have strong positive attitudes toward the American flag. Most of the attitudes measured in surveys are toward people (such as people running for public office) or toward government policies (such as legalized abortion or laws to limit who can purchase handguns). Many techniques have been developed to measure how positively or negatively people feel toward attitude objects of all kinds, and they are often used in surveys.

Preferences are based on comparisons of attitudes toward different objects. For example, if people are asked if they prefer hamburgers or hot dogs, they presumably compare their attitudes toward those two

foods and state which is more liked. Surveys are frequently used to obtain such preference data, whether preferences about presidential candidates or automobile makes.

The Media General—Associated Press poll reprinted above includes many attitude questions. For example, it reports that 70 percent of the public think “people should have the right to shoot intruders, even if they’re unsure the person is armed.” That is an attitude toward a policy. Later the article reports that 59 percent of the public felt that police were doing a good job. Again, that is an attitude, this time toward a group.

Beliefs and Predictions

Beliefs are opinions about the objective state of the world. For example, I might claim that the sky is blue today. This is a statement of a belief. Still another is “Ronald Reagan favors lowering taxes.” An example of a belief in the Media General—Associated Press poll report is that 73 percent of the public felt their homes were safe from crime. Beliefs may be true or untrue; what is important is that the individual who holds a belief thinks it is true. When survey researchers measure beliefs, they are not usually interested in finding out the truth. That is, they don’t conduct surveys to determine whether Ronald Reagan actually favors lowering taxes. If they wanted to learn that, there are better ways to do so. Rather, researchers usually measure beliefs in surveys because they are interested in what people think is true.

Surveys are also good at measuring *predictions* of the future. One example of a prediction is “the national unemployment rate will decrease during the next twelve months.” Another example is “I expect to find a job during the next week.” Or “Michael Dukakis will win the next presidential election.” Like beliefs, predictions need not be true, but it can be useful to know what the public believes about the future.

Surveys are often used to measure people’s beliefs about how *important* various things are. For example, academic surveys often ask the public what they believe is the most important problem facing the United States today. Surveys have also been used to measure how important parents think it is for their children to have various characteristics such as intelligence and honesty. Again, the public’s assessments of importance may not be correct, but they are nevertheless useful in their own right.

Facts and Past Behavioral Experiences

Finally, surveys are often used to measure *facts*. For example, people are often asked how many years they have attended school, how many bedrooms there are in their house, how many television sets their family owns, and so on. The Media General–Associated Press poll reports that three in ten Americans keep guns in their homes. The interest here is in learning the truth about these matters, so it is important that what people tell interviewers is actually true.

One of the most common uses of surveys is to measure people's *past behavioral experiences*. The National Health Survey, conducted by the United States Census Bureau, asks people how many times they visited a doctor during the last six months, how many times they were hospitalized, and so on. In the National Crime Survey, respondents are asked to report how many times they were victims of crimes during the previous month. In many political surveys, respondents are asked for whom they voted in the last presidential election.

The distinction between beliefs and facts is not always clean-cut. Many questions about facts actually turn out to be questions about beliefs. For example, answers as to how often the person was a victim of crime in the past month depends on the person's views as to what a crime is. Even when people are asked about their ethnicity, the answers often depend on what ethnic background the people consider themselves—and that is especially the case for people of mixed ethnic heritage.¹ The problems involved in asking about beliefs and facts are somewhat different, but the differences are not as large as one might expect.

GOALS OF SURVEYS

What kinds of questions can one answer with surveys? There are four broad classes of questions that surveys are used to address:

- The prevalence of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior
- Changes in them over time
- Differences between groups of people in their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior

¹See Tom Smith, "The Subjectivity of Ethnicity," in *Surveying Subjective Phenomena*, vol. 2., ed. Charles Turner and Elizabeth Martin (New York: Russell Sage, 1984).

- Causal propositions about these attitudes, beliefs, and behavior

Prevalence of Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behavior

Surveys are most often used to measure the frequency of certain attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Thus, we use surveys to see what proportion of the public approves of the president's performance in office (an attitude), what proportion of the public feels that the Republican party is the party best able to deal with the economy (a belief), and what proportion of the public has been unemployed and looked for a job during the last month (a behavior).

If we want to ascertain the prevalence of such matters, surveys are an excellent way of measuring their occurrence. In fact, many researchers believe that the best way to find out what people like and believe is to ask them. There may be other ways to find out about behavior, but it is often difficult to determine the frequency of a behavior without asking people whether or not it is something they have done. As already pointed out, the Media General–Associated Press poll reprinted at the beginning of this chapter includes questions allowing assessment of the prevalence of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior.

Changes over Time

Measuring the prevalence of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior is generally only of limited interest. The proportions often mean little by themselves. To say, for example, that 53 percent of the public approves of the president's performance in office does not in itself tell us much. We know that a bare majority approve of his performance, but is that an improvement for him over last year's ratings or a decline? Is it better than other presidents have achieved or worse? These are *change* questions, and they are important. Thus, attitude changes are often more interesting than frequencies themselves.

Of course, the same holds for beliefs and behavior. If 33 percent of the public views the president as a conservative, an interesting question is whether that belief is stronger or weaker than it used to be—whether he is seen as moving to the right or the left. If 22 percent of high school students have used drugs in the past month, it is useful to know whether that percentage is higher or lower than previous years—whether there is an increase in drug use or whether it is tapering off. Repeated surveys are good ways for measuring change.

Subgroup Differences

Another way in which frequencies gain meaning is by comparing the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of different *groups* of people. It is often interesting to know whether one group is more likely to hold an attitude, have a belief, or perform a behavior than another group. Are men more likely than women to approve of the president's handling of foreign affairs? Are blacks more likely than whites to feel that the president is supportive of a strong federal government? Did men vote at a higher rate than women in the last election?

There are several possible reasons to look at subgroup differences. Sometimes, researchers are interested in the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of one group, for example the political behavior of women. Looking at a single group by itself is not very informative, since you cannot tell whether the group differs from the rest of the public. As a result, people interested in one group generally perform their research by comparing groups, as by comparing the political behavior of women with that of men.

At other times, researchers are interested in describing the demographics of an attitude, belief, or behavior. When political pollsters examine who supports the president, they are trying to discover the groups to which he appeals in order to understand the bases of his appeals. The report of the Media General–Associated Press poll draws several subgroup comparisons, such as whites feeling more secure against crimes in their homes than blacks, gun owners having less confidence in the local police than non-gun owners, and rural residents being more likely to keep guns for security than urban residents.

Assessing Causation

Surveys are also used to test causal propositions. Academic researchers are particularly interested in identifying the *causes* of social behavior. Why do some people approve of the president's performance more than others? To what extent is that approval due to the person's party ties, and to what extent is it due to other factors? Why do some people view the president as more conservative than others do? Why do some people vote in elections and others do not? Is it due to their reactions to the candidates in the particular election, or is it due to their early childhood learning about politics? These are the types of causal questions that can be addressed through surveys.

The Media General–Associated Press poll on crime considers a

causal question in its opening paragraphs. The author of the article was interested in what makes people feel safe from crime in their homes, and he or she thought that owning a gun might be a factor in making people feel secure. Instead, the poll found that 70 percent of gun owners felt secure in their homes compared with 75 percent of people who did not have guns. With that finding, a plausible causal hypothesis was disproved. The article does not probe further as to the causes of feeling safe at home; instead it turns at that point to the presentation of overall frequencies and subgroup differences.

Measuring frequencies, changes, and differences in attitudes, beliefs, and behavior is fairly straightforward, but as we shall see, testing causal hypotheses is more complicated. One has to include in the survey a variety of questions that tap alternative causal logics, then analyze the data to determine which causal explanation fits better.

CHOOSING THE BEST RESEARCH DESIGN

Surveys are one way to collect information about attitudes, beliefs, and behavior, but they are not the only way. Whenever surveys are considered, it is important to realize their limitations and consider the alternatives.

Experiments

One alternative is the experiment. Experiments permit researchers to control events in a way that is not possible in a survey. For example, if the effects of a political speech are to be studied, it might be appropriate (1) to ask some questions before the speech to gauge prior attitudes, (2) to vary systematically the content of the speech that the experimental subjects hear, and then (3) to observe differences in their subsequent attitudes. Causal propositions about changes in attitude, belief, or behavior can sometimes be tested more definitively in experiments than in surveys.

However, experiments often involve highly artificial conditions. Communications may have different effects in a contrived experimental setting than they would have in more natural settings. It is often unclear what results transfer from an experimental setting with volunteer subjects to the more general population under natural conditions. As a result, surveys might be better able to monitor phenomena such as the effects of campaign communications and attitude change over long periods of time as they naturally occur.

Aggregate Data

Another important alternative to surveys is analysis of aggregate data, such as election totals or census data, which measure variables at the level of a state, a county, a city, a ward in a city, a precinct, or a census tract. Aggregate data are widely available and are useful for certain purposes. For example, following a presidential election, vote counts reveal the actual number of votes cast for each candidate and the actual turnout figures. A survey can only estimate these figures.

However, aggregate data cannot substitute for survey data for all purposes, since aggregate data are not individual-level data. Suppose we were interested in studying the voting behavior of blacks. If we examined the election returns from black precincts, we might find that 90 percent of the votes cast in those precincts were Democratic. But we still would not know exactly how blacks voted. The black precincts are probably about 90 percent black, so this may mean that all the blacks in the black precincts voted Democratic, while all the whites in those precincts voted Republican. Or it may mean that all the whites in those precincts voted Democratic along with 89 percent of the blacks, while 11 percent of the blacks voted Republican. If blacks and whites turned out to vote at different rates, then these figures could be wrong. Perhaps all whites voted Democratic, all blacks voted Republican, but very few blacks voted. Furthermore, we have no way of knowing how blacks who did not live in black precincts voted. There is always the strong possibility of failing to notice an ecological fallacy when trying to deduce individual behavior (for example, the voting behavior of individual blacks) from the behavior of aggregates (for example, precinct election returns).

When only aggregate election data are available, such as when one wishes to study the 1832 presidential election, one must make the most of it. However, if one is interested in individual attitudes, it is usually better to use survey data.

Surveys

The explanation of mass behavior often requires mass attitude data that can be obtained only by a survey. We cannot assume that people think in certain ways without asking them what they think. We cannot regard aggregate data as equivalent to individual data, nor can

we use experiments as alternatives to the collection of data in the natural environment. If it is possible to ask people questions, we can gain much information about what they are thinking—and why they do things. When public attitudes and mass behavior are of interest, surveys play important roles in social science.

Of course, surveys also have their limitations. They are expensive, particularly if sophisticated procedures are implemented. Many surveys are run on a shoestring, but a large-scale national study can cost over a quarter of a million dollars. Also, people sometimes do not give truthful answers to questions. For example, more white people say they will vote for black candidates than actually do. Thus, surveys are less accurate sources of some sensitive information than are aggregate data.

Actually, surveys are often used nowadays in concert with experimental and aggregate data. In evaluation research, for example, a survey might be used to measure the crime rate and fear of crime before a new police program is instituted to fight burglary, and then another survey would be taken a few months later. The surveys help in the evaluation of the experimental program. Analysis of survey data also often makes use of aggregate data. For example, to compare attitudes of people who live in high-status areas and low-status areas, one could add to the survey data set some information about the demographic characteristics of each respondent's neighborhood.

SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

Sometimes, researchers decide that a survey is the best way to achieve research goals but that collecting a new set of survey data is impractical. In such situations, researchers occasionally decide to analyze survey data that someone else has already collected. This is termed *secondary analysis* to distinguish it from analysis by the primary investigators, who collected the data. It is becoming common for those who design a survey to make their data available to other researchers. The expense of surveys make this important, because few investigators can afford to collect their own survey data. Making data available to other researchers means that secondary analysts can test their own hypotheses and can check the findings of the original researchers. Even researchers planning to conduct their own surveys benefit from this development. They can learn from other studies on similar topics before they conduct their own project.

There are now several major archives that store data released by primary investigators. For example, the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, based at the University of Michigan, has an extensive archive of thousands of major national surveys from the United States and many other countries. In addition to survey data, the consortium also stores data on national attributes, United States census data, and data on world-event interactions. Often within a year of a survey, universities that belong to the consortium can obtain the survey data free, and nonmember universities can purchase individual sets of data for a fee. The Gallup, Harris, and Roper polls have similar services that permit their surveys to be acquired by interested researchers. Since these archives contain data from surveys done as long as thirty years ago, they permit researchers to evaluate attitude and demographic changes over long periods. The National Science Foundation's Division of Social and Economic Science now requires data collected with its funds to be placed in an archive for the general use of the larger scientific community.

Table 1.1 lists some of the continuing surveys in the consortium's holdings. Earlier in this chapter, we described two of the major ongoing studies—the American National Election Studies and the General Social Survey. There have also been continuing studies focusing on consumer attitudes, health, nutrition, crime, employment, income, and political socialization. The Euro-Barometers have surveyed since 1975 in several Western European nations, focusing on political variables and values. In addition, there are many state polls and some local polls, including the Detroit Area Study, which has conducted surveys on different sociological and political topics in Detroit since the 1950s.

As a result of the development of such archives, secondary analysis is now very common—probably even more common than primary analysis. Most large universities have large collections of survey and other data available for secondary analysis by faculty and students.

SUMMARY

Survey research is very popular. It permits us to measure the prevalence of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, to study change in them over time, to examine subgroup differences, and to test causal propositions about the sources of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Surveys have important advantages over other research methods and are therefore a useful tool for social scientific investigations.

Table 1.1 Some Continuing Surveys Archived by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research

ABC News/Washington Post Polls	1981–
American National Election Studies (CPS)	1948–
Chicago Council on Foreign Relations American Public Opinion & U. S. Foreign Policy	1975, 1979, 1982 1965–66, 1975–76
Americans' Use of Time (SRC)	1973–
Annual Housing Surveys (Census Bureau)	
Annual Survey of Governments (Census Bureau)	1973–
British Election Study	1969–
CBS/ <i>New York Times</i> Polls	1976–
Census of Governments (Census Bureau)	1962–
Census of Population & Housing (Census Bureau)	1790–
Consumer Attitudes & Behavior (SRC)	1953–
Current Population Surveys (Census Bureau)	1968–
Detroit Area Studies	1953–78
Euro-Barometers	1975–
European Community Study	1970–73
General Social Surveys (NORC)	1972–
German Election Studies	1961–
Health Interview Surveys (National Center for Health Statistics)	1970–
Health & Nutrition Examination Surveys (National Center for Health Statistics)	1971–
Juvenile Detection & Correction Facility Census (U. S. Dept. of Justice)	1971–
Monitoring the Future (SRC)	1976–
National Camping Market Surveys (U. S. Dept. of Agriculture)	1971, 1973, 1978
National Crime Surveys (U. S. Dept. of Justice)	1972–
National Jail Census (U. S. Dept. of Justice)	1970–
National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience	1966–
National Surveys of Family Growth (National Center for Health Statistics)	1973–
Panel Study of Income Dynamics (SRC)	1968–
Retirement History Longitudinal Survey (Social Security Administration)	1969–
Survey of Income & Program Participation (Census Bureau)	1983–
Women in Development (Census Bureau)	1979–83
Youth Socialization Panel Survey (CPS)	1965–

Organization Abbreviations

CPS: Center for Political Studies (University of Michigan)

NORC: National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago)

SRC: Survey Research Center (University of Michigan)

Questions

1. For the next two days keep track of all reports of polls you read or hear. Be especially sensitive to reports that do not mention polls but that contain information which could be obtained only through a survey.
2. Find a recent news story that reports a poll. Who sponsored the poll? Does it report attitudes, beliefs, behavior, or some combination of the three? What were the purposes of the poll?

The Survey Process

There are many steps involved in survey research. Before a survey is conducted, important decisions must be made about the objectives of the study and the design of the survey. We describe each of them in this chapter.

A STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Any research study must begin with a statement of its objectives. What does one want to study? On what subject is information desired? If the goal is to test a certain proposition, the statement of objectives should state the proposition clearly and should also state how an appropriate test of the proposition could be constructed. This statement of objectives will guide the selection of respondents (the persons who are interviewed) and the writing of questions so as to guarantee that the survey design meshes with the study's objectives. The more complete the statement of objectives, the more assurance there is that the survey design can be shaped to satisfy them.

Construction of Hypotheses

In scientific research, the specific propositions to be tested are called *hypotheses*. The social sciences are most interested in testing *causal hypotheses*, propositions about the causes of phenomena. For